Blindness Control

1295. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has the dubious distinction of having the largest number of blind persons in the world; and

(b) if so, the measures taken to improve serious health problems of people affected by blindness?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) As per WHO estimates, there are 45 million blind persons in the world out of which nearly 7 million blind persons are in India.

(b) Following measures are being taken to prevent and control blindness and restore vision of the affected population:

1. Free Cataract Surgery at Government Hospitals and by Voluntary Organisations.
2. Screening of children with refractive errors and provisions of corrective glasses.
3. Collection and transplantation of donated eyes for treatment of corneal blindness.
4. Public awareness for prevention and treatment of Eye ailments.

Aid given by Gates Foundation

1296. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Bill Melinda Gates Foundation has increased its aid to combat HIV/AIDS from $ 100 million to $ 200 million;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the aid given for fighting HIV/AIDS has any conditionalities attached to it; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the reasons for accepting foreign aid with the conditionalities attached to it which may militate against our

time-tested policy of pursuing on independent line on all international issues?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has announced an increase in the package of financial assistance to combat HIV/AIDS from $ 100 million to $ 200 million at their India AIDS Initiative (Avahan) Programme Board meeting in New Delhi on October 13, 2003. This has been done to strengthen the different strategies like focus on prevention among high-risk groups and along national highways particularly in six high prevalence States namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland & Tamil Nadu, under the India AIDS Initiative Programme on the Foundation.

(c) Government of India has not so far received any funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We are not aware of any conditionalities other than the need for accelerated achievement and independent monitoring by an external agency. This is the normal precaution in the case of any/every grant utilized.

(d) Does not arise.

Base hospitals in Uttaranchal

1297. SHRI HARISH RAWAT: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) the districts in Uttaranchal where base hospitals with advance medicine facilities have not been set up so far;

(b) whether Government are providing financial assistance for offering basic medical facilities to the people living in large parts of the state; and

(c) if so, by when the base hospitals would be set up in the said districts?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ): (a) and (c) Health being a State subject, it is the responsibility of the State Government to provide medical facilities to the people living in the state keeping in view their priorities and availability of resources. However, on the basis of socio-economic status, regional